

Students help out with trail

Mrs. Crispell's fifth grade students from Westmoreland Elementary School used a field trip in May to help prepare the Back Mountain Trail for opening. The students planted flowers, which were obtained through donations from parents and Rave's Garden Center and Huntsville Nursery, at the entrance to the trail. The trip was a community service project for the class.

Shown in photos: Top, from left; Sam Alaimo, Chris Perrish, Katie Peters, Ally Spaciano and Judy Rimple, president of the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association. Brittany Clarke is kneeling in the foreground. Near right photo, Ally Kovalchik, left, and Elizabeth Heintz with some of the flowers ready for planting. Far right, Michael Fasulka, left, and Kyle Baines dug some dirt.

PHOTOS BY NANETTE BOZENTKA



Trail

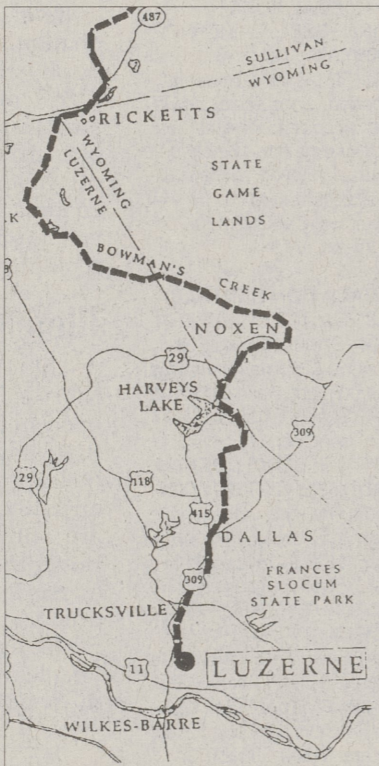
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with a determination which could not be ignored. "She is the reason this is all happening," he said. "She pestered the hell out of us until she got what she needed to move forward."

The trail currently stretches north from Parry Street in Luzerne to Wildcat Falls. The rolled gravel path runs parallel to Toby's Creek and is accessible to strollers, bicycles and wheel chairs. "About the only thing you can't do on the trail is rollerblade," said Rimple.

A second mile of the Back Mountain Trail, which will extend to Post Road in Trucksville, will open by the fall. "This path will lead to our front door," said Paul Sabol, member of the Kingston Township Board of Supervisors.

Right of way easements have been granted by land owners who held property in the path of the second mile of the trail. "It's been tough to get that portion of the project completed because a good deal of the land adjoining the Lehigh Valley Railroad right-of-way is privately owned," said Rimple. "But we have had tremendous cooperation from the community."



When completed, the trail will run to Ricketts Glen.

Rimple announced additional funding will be available to con-

tinue construction extending the project to Harveys Lake by the year 2003 and to Ricketts Glen the following year. "We have received word of two new grants. The first is from the Pennsylvania Conservation Corps for labor and materials and the second is a Transportation Enhancement Act (TEA-21) grant from PennDOT in the amount of \$480,000," she said.

Trail construction will also be extended in the other direction, eventually, joining the Susquehanna River levee system in Edwardsville. That stretch of greenway will provide a recreational link from downtown Wilkes-Barre to the heart of the Back Mountain. The Army Corps of Engineers will pave sections of the levee trail opening it to rollerblading enthusiasts.

The Anthracite Scenic Trails Association is a not-for-profit group which promotes the conversion of abandoned and inactive railroad beds into scenic trails. Those interested in joining the group, which meets at the Kingston Township building the third Tuesday of each month, may contact Judy Rimple at 675-9016.

Belles

(continued from page 1)

tending a one room schoolhouse with eight grades, I learned that if you have eyes, you should read; if you have ears, you should listen; and if you have a mouth, keep it shut," he said. "I stuck to that all my life; even in college I never said much."

College was not a reality for most young people in the years just after the Great Depression but Belles was provided an unusual opportunity. "We were poor, my family didn't have money for college and I was looking into business schools after graduation," he said. "One night, Mr. Wood, who was my principal at Noxen, came over to the house and said, 'Pack your bag; you're going to Mansfield on a Senatorial Scholarship.'" Wood accompanied the young Belles to college where he helped him find a place to live and register for courses.

Belles worked hard so as not to squander his good fortune. "I found a job which I can say had its ups and downs," said Belles, who spent three years as an elevator operator in the girls dormitory. "That job and the Senatorial Scholarship were enough to get me by while I was in school."

He graduated from Mansfield State College certified to teach math, science and English. Belles was a substitute teacher for several years before landing a full-time position at his former high school. "When I finished college, it was tough to find a teaching job unless you could afford to pay for one or you were willing to leave the area," he said. "I signed up to go to Alaska and the next thing I knew, I was teaching math at Noxen High School."

His fledgling career was interrupted after just a year, when Belles was drafted by the U.S. Army. He served four years in the African and European theaters prior to being discharged with the rank of captain.

Belles returned to Noxen upon completing his tour of duty and assumed the role of supervising principal. "Then I got malaria and I had to miss the first three weeks of school," he said.

Lois Kopcha, Lake-Lehman School Board member, was one of his students at Noxen High School. "Mr. Belles has a brilliant math mind and I would like to think a little of that rubbed off on me," she said. "As an administrator, he set the high standards which have distinguished our district."

"His values, contributions and leadership provided the district with the foundation upon which it rests today."

Dr. William Price
Superintendent of Schools

Many advancements in education occurred under Belles's careful watch. The Harveys Lake and Noxen schools joined forces, and later the Lake-Lehman School District was created. Belles was named superintendent following the jointure and he remained at the top post until his retirement in 1978.

The Lake-Lehman High School and Lehman-Jackson Elementary School were built during his tenure, providing children in the district new access to modern educational facilities. "Bob Belles was a master of getting a high quality education at a reasonable expense to the community and to him frugal was reasonable," said John Zaleskas, fellow teacher and administrator.

Dr. William Price, Superintendent, credits Belles with creating a model for his successors to imitate. "I've followed many of his leads. His values, contributions and leadership provided the district with the foundation upon which it rests today," said Price.

After two decades of retirement, Belles is still keenly aware of the changes taking place in our schools and he remains a staunch supporter of the district's educators. "I don't know how you would go about doing it, but I'd like to see the kids given back to the teachers," he said. "Teachers have to be given a measure of authority to deal with issues in their classrooms."

Belles also advocates a formal dress code and thinks the casual

atmosphere contributes to problems in public schools. "I see these kids going to school and don't know who put them out on the road," he said. "If I were still in charge, I'd enforce a dress code starting in the first grade." His idea is to allow each grade to wear a different color, for example first graders might wear blue tops while second graders wear green. "I would have the world's most colorful school," he said.

Some of his ideas, such as boosting the minimum age for a driver's license to 18, may seem conservative. But those who worked with Belles over the years quickly recall his commitment to area youth and judging from the feelings of his teen-age grandchildren, he is still in touch with the attitudes of the younger generations. "We are very proud of him," said Bobby Belles. "He is a great influence in our lives."

His ability to touch so many lives led those who have known Bob Belles over the years to gather at a ceremony in his honor Saturday. The Belles family, friends, fellow educators and government officials crowded into a bustling auditorium to celebrate his accomplishments and to express their gratitude. The Lake-Noxen Elementary School was named in his honor and the day was declared Bob Belles Day in Luzerne County.

Belles, clearly overwhelmed by the tribute, had one last bit of advice for the assembly. "After listening to all the nice things said here today, I think somebody better go out and search for the real Bob Belles," he humbly joked.

"If I were still in charge, I'd enforce a dress code starting in the first grade."

Bob Belles
Retired superintendent

Health & Safety Fair planned for June 11

Rural Health Corporation's Monroe-Noxen Health Center will present its 5th Annual Children's Health and Safety Fair Friday, June 11 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at its facility on Route 29, Noxen.

This year's fair will feature special informational programs including KidsCare ID, Stranger Danger, Eddie Eagle Gun Safety, as well as free Hillside Farms ice cream for the children, seasonal safety information, games, prize drawings and give-aways.

School and day care groups are asked to make reservations. For more information, please call 298-2121.

Wright's NAPA AutoCare Center

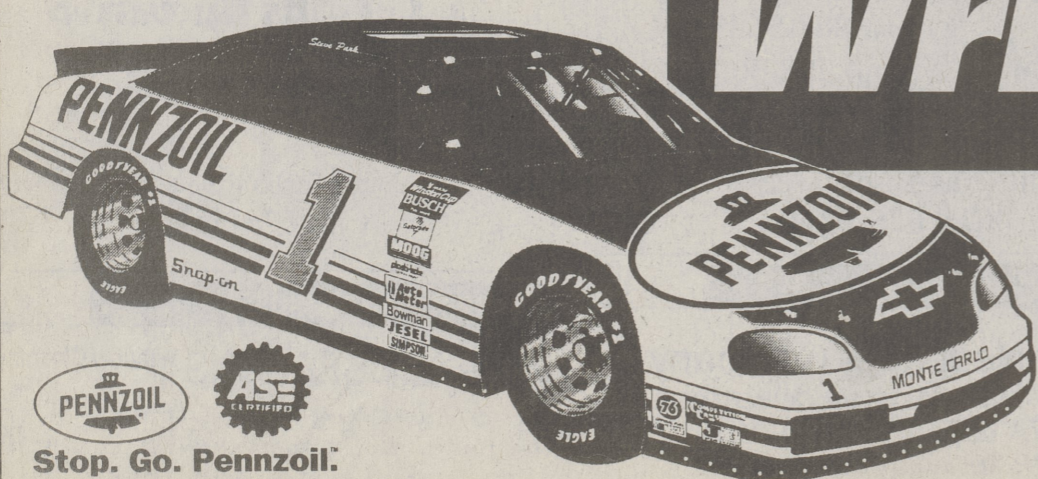
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